

# Kissinger on Camp David

by  
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Comfortably situated at his unmarked office in Downtown Washington at the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Henry Kissinger is beyond doubt the most powerful out-of-office Secretary of State in memory. For that reason alone his recent speech on the Middle East situation deserves careful scrutiny.

Kissinger's outlook was presented in early November before the World Jewish Congress meeting in New York. In it he focused on three themes:

1. The fragile nature of the peace being established between Egypt and Israel;
2. The necessity for the United States and Israel to work out a "private understanding" — essentially an agreement to disagree — on matters such as the future of the West Bank and Palestinian self-determination.
3. The dangers presented by the turmoil in Iran which could bring about "a loss of all that has been achieved in the Middle East".

Speaking of the Camp David frameworks — an outcome Kissinger had supported even when the Carter administration was hesitant about such a bi-lateral peace — "peace needs the most careful and thoughtful nurturing", Kissinger urged. "The Egyptian-Israeli negotiations will be concluded within the very near future" he predicted, and "they will create their own reality. They will mark both a political and a spiritual change."

Still, Kissinger suggested, it will be imperative to build a firm peace and not to push the new relationship too far too fast. Time will be needed for adjustment to the new realities, he warned. "Many Israelis and Jews



operate on the principle that anything worth doing is worth overdoing", Kissinger pointed out. "But I see no political necessity that every Israeli bus line have a terminal in Cairo."

So while it is important that contacts start between the two countries, Kissinger continued, "it is also important that these contacts be developed in a manner which is compatible with the self-perception of Egypt — which is still a Moslem country and still related to other Arab countries".

"It is important", Kissinger added, that "if we are going to move into a genuine period of increasing co-operation there must be some priorities established, some focal point created, and the dialogue should be conducted in a manner compatible with the self-respect and the image of themselves of all the parties, lest this fragile map be destroyed at its very beginning".

Concluding this part of his talk, Kissinger suggested that commissions be established among diaspora Jews and among Israelis "to determine what forms of cooperation are possible

and which are not. There is a forgetting", Kissinger solemnly intoned, "that most wars in history have begun between countries at peace. Therefore one should not believe that a peace treaty is the end of all history or the end of any political conflict or that one can rest on it for all eternity".

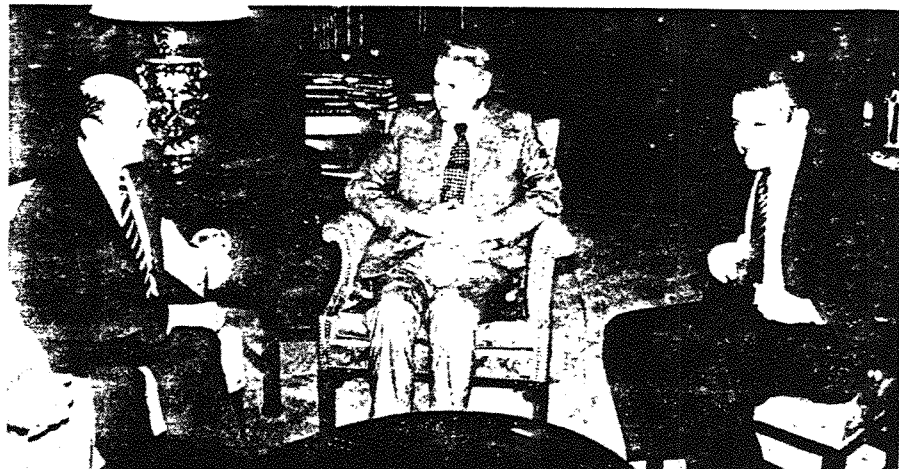
Then the former Secretary of State went on to point out that the Camp David agreement was more than a separate Egyptian-Israeli peace. In the exhilaration of the approaching peace treaty it is sometimes forgotten that there is also a West Bank agreement, he reminded his audience of about 300 Jewish leaders.

And though insisting that "I will not engage in any exigesis on its meaning, however, on any interpretation it will inevitably reduce Israeli control over the destiny of the Arabs living in the West Bank". Furthermore, Kissinger added, "as that agreement has been written, I see no reference to any changes in the '67 frontiers".

This brought Kissinger to the second major point of his speech. While suggesting that the Israelis had to "become clearer among themselves just what it is they have agreed to" and what this historical process is that has been generated, he urged the US and Israel to reach a "private understanding as to where this process is going to go".

In what could be taken as criticism of both Prime Minister Begin and President Carter, Kissinger noted that "always in the past the US worked out a strategic agreement with the government in Jerusalem about where we were going and what we wanted to do", even though tactics sometimes differed. "It's very dangerous", Kissinger stated, "to let a series of crises develop and to try to solve them under the impact of deadlock. Even if this has worked once, conditions are not the same on the West Bank as they are in the Sinai".

"Overall", Kissinger stated in concluding his comments about Camp David, "I'm optimistic. In the Middle East it's sometimes easier to do something than to talk about it". But, he cautioned, "some relationship has to be found between the legalistic, talmudic tradition of Jewish negotiators and the epic poetry tradition of Arab approaches to the problem".



Kissinger urges the US and Israel to reach a "private understanding as to where this process is going to".

And by way of seeming to give advice to the Israelis about their usual insistence on legalistic decisions, he recalled the 1975 negotiations. There was then "a great debate about uninterrupted access to the Abu Rodeis oil field at a time before any one realised there was only one road and the topography was such that no other could be built. Finally in despair I proposed that both Israel and Egypt use the same road on alternate days. I only thought it would get me through two weeks while I thought of something better. But it turned out that this was the formula that both enthusiastically accepted. Whose sovereignty controls this road nobody asked and nobody has ever asked. So I think that in the future of the West Bank some attempt might be made to go back to this good approach of de facto arrangement".

Then, turning to the larger regional context of this Egyptian-Israeli peace, Kissinger made his third point to his Jewish audience.

"Israel and Jews all over the world have to not only be concerned about the survival of Israel", he insisted, "but also about the condition of stability and progress in the whole area".

"We have seen Soviet attempts", Kissinger noted, "to use individual Arab countries as a base for radicalization of the area. But we are seeing something even more fundamental now, where the concepts of development that the west has introduced all over the world are producing political dislocations to which the originators of the concepts have been unable to give answers. And though these political dislocations may be quite unrelated to the Arab-Israeli dispute, yet

they have the profoundest consequences", Kissinger stated.

"We see today in Iran", he added, becoming specific, "that the Shah is caught between those who think he has moved too rapidly and others who think he hasn't moved rapidly enough". Kissinger then challenged the Carter administration's priorities by stating that "I'm not afraid to say that abstract human rights slogans by the US are accelerating this problem" in Iran. "A pro-western, stable Iran is absolutely essential for a peaceful Middle East", Kissinger insisted. "If Iran should become a neutralist country, the whole pattern of relationships would fundamentally change and the prospects of peace will be fundamentally affected".

Because of regional tensions, Kissinger continued, "a situation could arise where, not because the peace agreements are unsatisfactory but because domestic evolutions have gone out of control, we could see a total radicalization of all the Middle East and a loss of all that has been achieved".

In concluding his talk, Kissinger suggested that Israel, having gone through economic development and political change, could offer many lessons to the other countries in the area. "It is essential that we understand the geopolitical challenges and the developmental challenges with political consequences we have totally neglected, in a materialistic obsession with the belief that economic development is an end in itself and does not produce political and philosophical dislocation of the profoundest nature". In this sense, Kissinger argued, Israel could "make a tremendous contribution".